

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2015

Under Secretary Lisa Mensah
USDA Rural Development
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-0002

Dear Under Secretary Mensah,

We write to express our support for the application submitted by the Windham County Sheriff's Office to USDA's Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) Grant Program (CFDA#10.446). We are pleased to bring this proposal to your attention.

The applicant's proposed Liberty Mill Justice Center holds great promise as a model for criminal justice and corrections reform in Vermont and perhaps the nation. This innovative centralized community center will bring many functions of the justice system under one roof. It will offer transitional housing and specialized services for those recently released from prison; secure facilities for state and federal detainees; safe space options for the community; and alternatives to incarceration for the court system. The Justice Center will also house the sheriff's administrative offices and regional dispatch services. The model will bring together myriad community partners to help foster reintegration, reduce recidivism, and provide much-needed education and workforce training for those housed at the Justice Center.

This project will create 40 to 60 new jobs that will be located in Bellows Falls, a designated high-poverty area that USDA has listed as an FY15 Opportunity Community. It is a region struggling to combat substance abuse, high incarceration rates and homelessness. This grant will help the Windham County Sheriff's Office fund rehabilitation for the established building site, which is at high-risk of becoming a blighted building without this project.

This community-based criminal justice reform initiative is broadly supported by the Vermont Department of Corrections; Vermont Judiciary; Vermont Department of Public Safety; Vermont Agency of Human Services; Vermont Police Academy; Springfield Hospital; Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Vermont; Community College of Vermont and others.

We believe the Liberty Mill Justice Center project is well suited for the RCDI Grant Program and we appreciate you giving its application the serious consideration it deserves. If we can provide further evidence of our support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States Representative